J.S. Mill

Utilitarianism

Bio

- Born in London (1806-1873)
- East India Co.
- Precocious child
- Influential works in political phil., economics, and feminism.

Prelims

- Utilitarianism is a type of consequentialist moral theory

- Only the consequences of an act determine its rightness or wrongness (contrast Aristotle and Kant)

Prelims

- An act is right (good) only in so far as it brings about a <u>good state of affairs</u>.

- Different views on what exactly constitutes a good state of affairs.

Happiness :)

- For Mill, a good state of affairs is one where <u>happiness</u> is experienced.

so,

- **The right (good) act is the one that <u>produces</u> the most amount of total happiness possible for the most amount of sentient creatures.**

Happiness :)

What is 'happiness'?

- Pleasure and the absence of pain

What is 'unhappiness'?

- Pain and the absence of pleasure

Pleasure

Two kinds of pleasure:

- Pleasures of the body ("base")

- Pleasures of the mind ("noble")

Pleasure

For Mill,

The 'noble' pleasures "count for more"; they're "better" than the 'base' pleasures.

e.g. Gizmo vs. "the Mrs."

Happiness (both pleasures)

Principle of Impartiality:

- One is not to prefer their own happiness (or the happiness of their loved ones) over the happiness of another.

A distinction

Two major types of utilitarianism:

- Act UT (no moral rules).

- Rule UT (moral rules, but their authority derives from their conduciveness to happiness).

Argument for utilitarianism

1. The ultimate goal of all human beings *is* the attainment of happiness. (Happiness is the sole thing that we *want* for itself).

2. **So**, all of us *should* strive to attain this happiness for ourselves and everyone else.

Argument cont…

3. **So**, the standard that determines whether our actions are right (what we should be doing), or wrong (what we shouldn't be doing) is whether or not our actions result in producing this happiness.

- (3 is another way of stating the 'Principle of Utility').

Problems with the argument?

- Assume premise 1, does the first conclusion follow? (Hume's Law)?

- Is premise 1 even true? ('Experience Machine').